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Profiles of Ethnic Communities in Canada

The West Asian Community in Canada

2001

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Profiles of Ethnic Communities in Canada

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.	not available for any reference period
..	not available for a specific reference period
...	not applicable
0	true zero or a value rounded to zero
0^s	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
^{p}	preliminary
^{r}	revised
x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
^{E}	use with caution
F	too unreliable to be published

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Information on the series

This report was prepared by the Target Groups Project of Statistics Canada. This report is part of a series of profiles which will include profiles of the East Indian, Filipino, Haitian, Jamaican, Japanese, Korean, Lebanese and Vietnamese communities in Canada, as well as profiles of Canadians of African, Arab, Caribbean, Latin American, South Asian and Chinese origins.

Ordering print copies

To order print copies of this profile or any of the other profiles in this series, contact the Multiculturalism Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage at 1-888-77MULTI 1-888-776-8584 or 819-953-1970. The report is also available free of charge on the Statistics Canada website at: http://www.statcan.ca

Questions or comments

For questions or comments about the content of this report, please contact Statistics Canada at 613-951-2603; fax 613-951-0387 or e-mail lindcol@statcan.ca.

Highlights

- Canadians of West Asian origin make up one of the largest non-European ethnic groups in Canada. In 2001, just over 200,000 people of West Asian origin lived in Canada.

- Almost three quarters of Canadians of West Asian origin were born outside the country. As well, the majority of West Asian immigrants living in Canada are relatively recent arrivals.

- The Canadian population of West Asian origin is concentrated primarily in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia. In addition, most live in either Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver.

- The West Asian population in Canada is relatively young. In 2001, 41% of those who reported West Asian origin were under the age of 25, compared with 33% of the overall population. In contrast, Canadians of West Asian origin are about half as likely as those in the overall population to be over the age of 65.

- Almost all Canadians of West Asian origin can carry on a conversation in at least one official language. At the same time, though, the majority of Canadians of West Asian origin speak a language other than English or French at home.

- Canadians of West Asian origin are somewhat more likely than other adults to be married. On the other hand, people of West Asian origin are considerably less likely than other Canadians to live in a common-law relationship. They are also slightly less likely than the rest of the population to be lone parents.

- Canadians of West Asian origin are less likely than other adults to live alone. This is especially true for seniors of West Asian origin, just 18% of whom lived alone in 2001, compared with 29% of all seniors in Canada.

- Canadian adults of West Asian origin are almost twice as likely as the rest of the population to have a university degree.

- In 2001, 56% of adults of West Asian origin were employed. That year, 11.8% of labour force participants of West Asian origin were unemployed.

- The incomes of Canadians of West Asian origin are about $6,000 less on average than the figure for all Canadians.

- In 2000, 37% of people of West Asian origin were considered to live in a low-income situation.

Introduction

This report describes the basic social and economic characteristics of people of the West Asian community in Canada. It is part of a series of profiles of the country's major non-European ethnic groups.

The information in this profile is taken mostly from the 2001 Census of Canada, the most recent source of census data. Statistics Canada conducts the Census every five years. One in five households receives a long questionnaire that asks household residents to indicate the ethnic or cultural origins to which their ancestors belonged. This profile is based on people who reported they had West Asian origins. People could list West Asian as the only ethnic or cultural group of their ancestors, or list the origin along with other ethnic or cultural groups.

This publication also uses information from the Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS), which was conducted in 2002 by Statistics Canada in partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage. The EDS surveyed more than 42,000 Canadians over the age of 15. The objectives of the EDS were to understand more about how people's backgrounds affect their participation in Canadian society, economy and culture, and how Canadians from different ethnic backgrounds report and describe their ethnicity.

Although the EDS and the Census provide very useful information, caution should be exercised in making direct comparisons between groups, particularly as they relate to causal implications, because the data have not been adjusted to take into account differences in age, education, length of time in Canada and other factors.

This profile is based on the Census population, which includes the following groups:

- Canadian citizens (by birth or by naturalization) and landed immigrants with a usual place of residence in Canada (including those who are abroad, either on a military base or attached to a diplomatic mission; or who are at sea or in port aboard merchant vessels under Canadian registry),
- Persons with a usual place of residence in Canada who are claiming refugee status and members of their families living with them,
- Persons with a usual place of residence in Canada who hold:
  - a student authorization (student visa or student permit);
  - an employment authorization; or
  - a Minister's permit (including extensions);
  - and members of their families living with them.

For the purpose of this profile, the term "Canadians" includes all persons with a usual place of residence in Canada, regardless of their citizenship status.

The West Asian Community in Canada

A growing community

Canadians of West Asian origin[1] make up one of the largest non-European ethnic groups in Canada. In 2001, just over 200,000 people of West Asian origin lived in Canada. That year, they represented almost 1% of the total population of Canada.

Table 1
Selected ethnic groups in Canada, other than English, French and Canadian, 2001

	Total population	Multiple responses	Single responses	Total Canadian population
		thousands		percentage
South Asian	963.2	160.9	802.3	3.2
Caribbean	503.8	180.2	323.6	1.7
Arab	348.0	109.4	238.6	1.2
African	294.7	110.0	184.7	1.0
Latin American	244.4	94.3	150.1	0.8
West Asian	**205.0**	**47.8**	**157.1**	**0.7**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

The number of people of West Asian origin in Canada is growing considerably faster than the overall population. Between 1996 and 2001, for example, the number of people reporting they had West Asian origins rose by 46%, while the overall population grew by only 4%.

The West Asian community in Canada includes people from a number of countries from that part of the world. The largest share of the West Asian population, 43% in 2001, were Iranian, while 20% were Armenian, 12% were Afghan, and 12% were Turks.

The majority of Canadians with West Asian roots report only one ethnic origin. In 2001, 77% of all those who said they had West Asian ancestry reported only one ethnic origin, while 23% reported multiple ethnic origins. In contrast, almost 40% of the overall Canadian population reported multiple ethnic roots.

The majority are foreign-born

A substantial majority of West Asians living in Canada were born outside the country. In 2001, 73% of Canadians who reported West Asian origin were born outside of Canada, compared with 18% of the overall population.

The majority of foreign-born people of West Asian origin living in Canada are relatively recent arrivals. Of immigrants with West Asian origins living in Canada in 2001, 52% had arrived in the previous decade, while another 25% had come to Canada between 1981 and 1990. In contrast, only about 5% had arrived in the 1960s, while just 2% had come to Canada before 1961.

1. All statistical information in this publication referring to West Asian, the West Asian community, Canadians of West Asian origin or people of West Asian origin denotes those who reported West Asian origins either alone or in combination with other origins in response to the question of ethnic origin in the 2001 Census or 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey.

Most live in one of three provinces

The Canadian population of West Asian origin is concentrated primarily in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia. Indeed, in 2001, 94% of those who reported West Asian origin lived in one of these provinces. That year, 58% of those with West Asian origin lived in Ontario, while 20% lived in Quebec and 16% made British Columbia their home.

Overall, almost 120,000 people of West Asian origin lived in Ontario in 2001, while 41,000 lived in Quebec and 32,000 resided in British Columbia. That year, Canadians of West Asian origin represented about 1% of the population in each of these three provinces, while they represented only a fraction of the total population in the remaining provinces and territories.

Table 2

The West Asian population in Canada, by province and territory, 2001

	Total West Asian population	The provincial/territorial population	The total West Asian population in Canada
	thousands	percentage	
Newfoundland and Labrador	0.1	0.0	0.1
Prince Edward Island	0.0	0.0	0.0
Nova Scotia	1.1	0.1	0.5
New Brunswick	0.4	0.1	0.2
Quebec	41.0	0.6	20.0
Ontario	118.8	1.1	58.0
Manitoba	1.7	0.2	0.8
Saskatchewan	0.9	0.1	0.4
Alberta	9.0	0.3	4.4
British Columbia	31.8	0.8	15.5
Yukon	0.1	0.2	0.0
Northwest Territories	0.1	0.1	0.0
Nunavut	0.0	0.1	0.0
Canada	**205.0**	**0.7**	**100.0**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

Most live in large cities

The large majority of the Canadian population of West Asian origin lives in Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. In 2001, 77% of the overall West Asian ethnic community in Canada lived in one of these three census metropolitan areas. That year, there were close to 90,000 people of West Asian origin living in Toronto, while there were close to 40,000 in Montreal and almost 30,000 in Vancouver. Overall, people of West Asian origin represented 2% of the populations of Toronto and Vancouver, along with 1% in Montreal.

A young population

The West Asian community is relatively young compared to the overall Canadian population. In 2001, children under the age of 15 made up 24% of those who reported West Asian origin, compared with 19% of the overall population. At the same time, 17% of people reporting West Asian origin were aged 15 to 24, compared to 13% of the overall population. People in their prime working years also make up a larger share of the West Asian population than that of Canada overall; that year, 35% of the West Asian population in Canada was between the ages of 25 and 44, compared with 31% for the overall population.

Table 3
Age distribution of the West Asian community and overall Canadian population, 2001

	West Asian community			Total Canadian population		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
			percentage			
Age group						
Under 15	23.2	24.1	23.6	20.2	18.6	19.4
15 to 24	17.3	16.8	17.0	14.0	13.0	13.4
25 to 44	34.6	34.5	34.6	30.4	30.6	30.5
45 to 64	19.0	17.9	18.4	24.4	24.4	24.4
65 and over	6.0	6.8	6.4	10.9	13.4	12.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Total population in thousands	**107.7**	**97.3**	**205.0**	**14,564.3**	**15,074.8**	**29,639.0**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

In contrast, Canadians of West Asian origin are considerably less likely than those in the overall population to be either a senior or approaching retirement age. In 2001, people aged 65 and over made up 6% of the West Asian community, compared to 12% of all Canadians. Similarly, 18% of people who reported West Asian origin were aged 45 to 64, compared to 24% of the overall population.

Slightly more men than women

In contrast to the overall population, men make up the slight majority of Canadians of West Asian origin. In 2001, 53% of the West Asian population, compared with only 49% of the overall population, was male. Like their counterparts in the overall population, though, women make up the majority of seniors of West Asian origin. In 2001, 51% of people aged 65 and over of West Asian origin were women, while in the overall population, women made up 56% of seniors.

Most can converse in an official language

Almost all Canadians in the West Asian community can carry on a conversation in at least one official language.[2] In fact, in 2001, 93% of people of West Asian origin could converse in English or French or both. On the other hand, only 7% of Canadians of West Asian origin could not speak either English or French.

While most Canadians of West Asian origin can speak at least one official language, the majority have a mother tongue[3] other than English or French. In 2001, 80% of people in the West Asian community said that their mother tongue was a non-official language.

The majority of Canadians of West Asian origin also speak a language other than English or French at home. In 2001, 57% of people who reported West Asian origin said that they spoke only a non-official language in their home.

2. English and French are recognized as Canada's official languages in the *Official Languages Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

3. A mother tongue is the language that a person learns first in childhood and that they still understand.

At the same time, though, almost all Canadians of West Asian origin who are employed speak English or French on the job. In 2001, only 3% of employed Canadians of West Asian origin spoke a non-official language most often at work, while another 2% regularly used a non-official language in combination with English or French on the job.

Most are Muslim

The majority of Canadians of West Asian origin are Muslims. In 2001, 53% reported they were Muslim, while 11% belonged to a Christian Orthodox sect, 9% belonged to a mainline Protestant denomination and 8% said they were Catholic. In contrast, relatively few people of West Asian origin have no religious affiliation. In 2001, just 6% said they had no religious affiliation, compared with 17% of the overall population.

Family status

Canadians of West Asian origin are slightly more likely than other adults to be married. In 2001, 53% of people aged 15 and over of West Asian origin were married, compared with 50% of all Canadian adults. In contrast, people of West Asian origin are less likely than other Canadians to live in a common-law relationship. In 2001, just 3% of adults of West Asian origin were living common-law, compared with 10% of all adult Canadians.

Canadian adults of West Asian origin are also about as likely as the rest of the population to be lone parents. In 2001, 5% of adult Canadians of West Asian origin were lone parents, compared to 6% of the total population. As with the rest of the population, though, the large majority of lone parents of West Asian origin are women. That year, women represented 82% of all lone parents of West Asian origin, while the figure in the overall population was 81%.

Table 4
Family status of the West Asian community and overall population aged 15 and over, by sex, 2001

	West Asian community			Total Canadian population		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
	percentage					
Married	51.9	53.5	52.7	51.0	48.3	49.6
Living common-law	3.3	2.2	2.8	10.0	9.4	9.7
Lone parent	1.6	8.5	4.9	2.1	8.7	5.5
Child living at home	25.4	22.4	24.0	19.0	14.0	16.4
Living with relatives	3.4	4.4	3.9	1.9	2.6	2.3
Living with non-relatives	5.0	2.3	3.7	4.7	3.3	4.0
Living alone	9.4	6.6	8.1	11.3	13.7	12.5
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

Few live alone

Canadians of West Asian origin are less likely than other adults to live alone. In 2001, just 8% of adults aged 15 and over in the West Asian community lived alone, compared to 13% of all Canadian adults. Seniors of West Asian origin are also less likely than their counterparts in the overall population to live alone. That year, 18% of West Asians aged 65 and over lived alone, compared with 29% of all seniors in Canada.

In contrast, seniors of West Asian origin are more likely than other seniors to live with members of their extended family. In 2001, 14% of people of West Asian origin aged 65 and over lived with relatives, such as the family of a son or daughter, compared with only 5% of all seniors in Canada.

Educational attainment

Canadian adults of West Asian origin are much more likely than the rest of the population to have a university degree. In 2001, 29% of Canadians of West Asian origin aged 15 and over were university graduates, compared with only 15% of the overall adult population.

As well, Canadians of West Asian origin are particularly likely to have a post-graduate degree. In 2001, 11% of people who reported West Asian origin had either a Master's Degree or a Doctorate, compared to only 5% of all Canadian adults.

As in the overall population, men of West Asian origin have somewhat more education than their female counterparts. In 2001, 32% of men of West Asian origin had a university degree, compared to 26% of female West Asians. However, both men and women of West Asian origin were much more likely than their respective counterparts in the overall population to have a university degree.

Young people of West Asian origin are also more likely than other young Canadians to be attending school. In 2001, 75% of people aged 15 to 24 in the West Asian community were enrolled in a full-time educational program, compared to just 57% of all Canadians in this age group.

Among young people of West Asian origin, males and females are about as likely to be attending school. In 2001, 75% of both women and men of West Asian origin aged 15 to 24 were enrolled in some form of full-time educational program. This contrasts with the overall population, in which young women were considerably more likely to be in school in 2001 than young men.

Table 5
Educational attainment of the West Asian community and overall Canadian population aged 15 and over, by sex, 2001

	West Asian community			Total Canadian population		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
	percentage					
Less than high school	21.9	25.4	23.6	31.4	31.1	31.3
High school graduate	13.5	15.2	14.3	13.1	15.1	14.1
Some postsecondary	12.2	12.3	12.2	10.7	11.0	10.8
Trades certificate/diploma	6.2	5.3	5.8	14.1	7.8	10.9
College graduate	9.7	11.5	10.5	12.5	17.3	15.0
University certificate/diploma below bachelor's degree	4.3	4.8	4.5	2.1	2.9	2.5
Bachelor's degree	18.8	18.3	18.5	10.6	10.6	10.6
Post-graduate degree	13.4	7.2	10.5	5.4	4.2	4.8
Total with university degree	32.3	25.5	29.1	16.0	14.9	15.4
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

Employment trends

Canadian adults of West Asian origin are somewhat less likely to be employed than the rest of the population. In 2001, 56% of adults of West Asian origin were employed, compared with 62% of all Canadians aged 15 and over. There is a particularly large difference between the employment rates of people of West Asian origin and the rest of the population between the ages of 25 and 44. That year, just 67% of West Asians in this age range were employed, compared to 80% of their counterparts in the overall population.

Table 6

Percentage of the population employed, by age group and sex, 2001

	West Asian community			Total Canadian population		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
	percentage					
Age group						
15 to 24	44.8	43.9	44.4	56.1	55.6	55.9
25 to 44	77.4	54.7	66.7	85.6	75.2	80.3
45 to 64	72.0	49.0	61.4	74.8	60.8	67.7
65 and over	18.0	5.3	11.6	13.0	4.8	8.4
Total	**64.1**	**46.6**	**55.8**	**67.2**	**56.1**	**61.5**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

As in the national population, men of West Asian origin are somewhat more likely than their female counterparts to be employed outside the home. In 2001, 64% of adult men of West Asian origin were part of the paid workforce, compared to 47% of adult women of West Asian origin. Both men and women of West Asian origin, though, were less likely to be employed than their respective counterparts in the overall population. In fact, there is a ten percentage point gap between the shares of West Asian women and all women in Canada who were employed that year, while there was a three percentage point difference in the figures for men.

Unemployment

Labour force participants[4] of West Asian origin are more likely to be unemployed than those in the general population. In 2001, 11.8% of labour force participants of West Asian origin were unemployed, compared with 7.4% of those in the overall population.

As in the overall population, people of West Asian origin between the ages of 15 and 24 are more likely to be unemployed than those in other age groups. In 2001, 16% of young labour force participants of West Asian origin were unemployed, although this was only slightly higher than the figure of 14% for all young Canadians.

Incomes

Canadians of West Asian origin generally have lower incomes on average than the rest of the population. In 2000,[5] people of West Asian origin had an average income from all sources of just under $24,000, almost $6,000 less per person than the figure for all Canadians.

4. Adults (aged 15 and over) who are employed, or are unemployed and looking for employment.

5. In the Census, people report their income for the previous year.

Table 7
Average incomes of the West Asian community and overall Canadian population, by age group and sex, 2000

	West Asian community			Total Canadian population		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
			dollars			
Age group						
15 to 24	8,626	7,777	8,227	11,273	9,046	10,182
25 to 44	31,628	20,384	26,502	40,450	26,306	33,308
45 to 64	36,998	21,604	30,392	46,955	26,767	37,026
65 and over	27,335	16,851	22,093	30,775	19,461	24,437
Total	**28,719**	**18,014**	**23,841**	**36,865**	**22,885**	**29,769**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

As in the overall population, women of West Asian origin have lower incomes than their male counterparts. In 2000, the average income for adult women of West Asian origin was $18,000, while the average for men of West Asian origin was almost $29,000. The income gap between women and men of West Asian origin, though, is about the same as the gap in the overall population. That year, the incomes of women of West Asian origin were 63% of those of their male counterparts, while the figure for all Canadian women was 62%.

Canadian seniors of West Asian origin also have relatively low incomes. In 2000, the average income from all sources for Canadians of West Asian origin aged 65 and over was $22,100, whereas the average for all Canadian seniors was $24,400.

As with all seniors in Canada, females of West Asian origin aged 65 and over have lower incomes than their male counterparts. In 2000, the average income for women of West Asian origin aged 65 and over was $16,900, compared with over $27,300 for male seniors of West Asian origin.

Canadians of West Asian origin receive a slightly greater share of their income from earnings[6] than those in the overall population. In 2000, Canadians of West Asian origin aged 15 and over reported that 80% of their income came from earnings, whereas the figure for all Canadians was 77%.

At the same time, Canadians of West Asian origin receive about the same share of their total income from government transfer programs as do other people in Canada. In 2000, 12% of the income of Canadians of West Asian origin aged 15 and over came from government transfers, the same figure for all Canadian adults.

Low income levels

Close to four out of ten Canadians of West Asian origin have incomes that fall below Statistics Canada's Low-income Cut-offs. In 2000, the incomes of 37% of people of West Asian origin were below the Low-income Cut-offs, compared with only 16% of the overall population.

6. Includes wages and salaries and net income from self-employment.

A large number of children of West Asian origin live in low-income families. In 2000, 43% of children of West Asian origin under the age of 15 lived in families with incomes below the Low-income Cut-offs, compared with 19% of all children in Canada.

As well, over half of unattached adults of West Asian origin have low incomes. In 2000, 56% of West Asian adults who lived alone had low incomes, compared with 38% of their counterparts in the overall population.

Seniors of West Asian origin who live alone are particularly likely to have low incomes. In 2000, 68% of unattached seniors aged 65 and over who reported a West Asian origin had incomes below the Low-income Cut-offs, whereas this was the case for just 40% of all unattached Canadian seniors.

As in the overall population, unattached female seniors of West Asian origin are the most likely to have low incomes. In 2000, 76% of women of West Asian origin aged 65 and over who lived alone had incomes below the Low-income Cut-offs, compared with 54% of unattached male seniors of West Asian origin and 43% of all unattached women in this age group.

Most feel a sense of belonging to Canada

According to the Ethnic Diversity Survey, a large majority of Canadians of West Asian origin said they had a strong sense of belonging in Canada. Indeed, in 2002, 86% of people of West Asian origin reported they had a strong sense of belonging to Canada. At the same time, 53% said that they had a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic or cultural group

Canadians of West Asian origin are also active in Canadian society. In 2002, 61% of those who were eligible to vote did so in the 2000 federal election. At the same time, 28% of people of West Asian origin indicated they had participated in an organization such as a sports team or organized religious activity in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Over one in four people of West Asian origin report they have experienced discrimination. In 2002, 27% of Canadians of West Asian origin said they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment based on their ethnicity, race, religion, language or accent in the past five years, or since they arrived in Canada.

Summary table

	People of West Asian origin			Total Canadian population		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Total population in thousands	**107.7**	**97.3**	**205.0**	**14,564.3**	**15,074.8**	**29,639.0**
Percentage change between 1996 and 2001	43.6	47.7	45.5	3.7	4.1	3.9
Percentage immigrant	73.3	73.0	73.1	18.0	18.7	18.4
Percentage with Canadian citizenship	71.5	70.4	71.0	94.9	94.5	94.7
Language						
Percentage able to speak English/French	95.2	91.3	93.3	98.8	98.2	98.4
Percentage speaking only non-official language at home	55.0	59.9	57.3	9.6	9.9	9.7
Age distribution						
Percentage aged less than 15	23.2	24.1	23.6	20.2	18.6	19.4
Percentage aged 25 to 44	34.6	34.5	34.6	30.4	30.6	30.5
Percentage aged 65 and over	6.0	6.8	6.4	10.9	13.4	12.2
Family status						
Percentage lone parents[1]	1.6	8.5	4.9	2.1	8.7	5.5
Percentage living alone[1]	9.4	6.6	8.1	11.3	13.7	12.5
Percentage seniors living alone	11.4	24.1	17.9	16.8	38.3	28.9
Education, employment and income						
Percentage with university degree[1]	32.3	25.5	29.1	16.0	14.9	15.4
Percentage employed[1]	64.1	46.6	55.8	67.2	56.1	61.5
Unemployment rate	10.3	14.0	11.8	7.6	7.2	7.4
Percentage with low income	36.1	37.8	36.9	14.7	17.7	16.2

1. Includes people aged 15 and over.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.